

Tips for Obtaining Letters of Recommendation

Below you will find general guidelines for asking someone to write a letter of recommendation. Check with your recommender to determine whether she or he has specific guidelines.

Who should I ask to write a letter of recommendation for me?

Please select individuals with whom you have had significant contact in contexts in which you have performed well.

Consider those who have

- taught you in more than one class,
- worked with you as a research assistant
- worked with you as a teaching assistant
- worked with you as your advisor, or
- taught you subject matter of particular relevance to the program or position for which you are applying.

How do I ask for a letter of recommendation?

Once you have determined who might be a good recommender, set up an appointment to meet with him or her at least one month prior to the deadline for your first letter. This will give your potential recommender plenty of time to write the letter or give you time to find another recommender if need be. At this initial meeting, ask whether he or she is willing to write you a letter of recommendation. If so, you should ask whether she or he can write you a letter that will *strongly* support your application. You want the best letter possible for your application. Someone who feels that he or she knows you well will be better able to write a letter representative of your talents and abilities. Be prepared to discuss why you think she or he would be a good person to write the letter and what specific information your recommender requires.

What kind of information will my recommender need about me?

Typically, a recommender will ask for several documents to help write your letter. Common examples of documents requested by recommenders are:

- Your resume or curriculum vitae
- A statement that reminds your recommender about when you first met and all of the contexts (class, advising, TA and RA opportunities, etc.) in which you know each other
- Your personal statement (if applying to graduate school)
- Information about the school/job for which you are applying
 - If you are applying to graduate programs, it can help if you briefly describe the admissions criteria -- not the coursework, but the characteristics of the sorts of applicants they seek, and a brief description of the program
- Some recommenders want you to delineate the ways that you think they have observed the behaviors relevant to the admissions criteria (i.e., being articulate, writing well, etc.) and those relevant to generally being good at whatever it is (i.e., on time, working well with others, responsible, etc.). If you are asked to do this, don't be shy. Point out your strengths without apology. Tell the recommender: *I demonstrated this quality by doing this thing*
- The *actual* deadline date for the letter.

This is not an exhaustive list, and individual recommenders may ask for specific information. Make sure that you include all information requested, so the recommender can write you the best letter possible.

What other information does my recommender need?

It is important to provide all the materials needed to write the letter. Many schools have a *recommendation form* that the recommender needs to fill out. Please provide that form for your recommender to use. Your recommender may have questions, so be certain to provide your contact information—particularly if you are not available through UWEC during the period your recommender is working on your letter.

Recommendations are either mailed directly to the school/employer or are returned to you to mail with your application. In either case, the letter must be sealed in an envelope. *Please provide all envelopes with the correct mailing information and indicate the intended recipient (i.e., the college, university, etc.).* If the envelope is to be mailed, please make sure that you include postage on the envelope. If you need the letter submitted back to you, please let your recommender know, so he or she can sign the envelope across the seal. This indicates that the letter has not been altered in any way. Self-address and stamp the envelope if you will be away from campus when you need the letter for your application.

What should I do about the section on the recommendation form about waiving rights to view the recommendation?

You will be asked whether you wish to waive your rights to view your letters of recommendation. Students have the right to choose whether to do so or not. However, opinions differ on how to respond to this question. To be safe, you should check with the recommender as to his or her preferences. Some feel that the recommendation is not valid unless the recommender can be completely honest about an applicant in private. No matter what you decide, remember to sign the form to indicate that you were the person who made the decision about waiving your right.

Should I remind the recommender of impending deadlines?

You should remind the recommender about a week before the letter is due.

What should I do after the letters have been sent?

Always write your recommender a note of thanks. Writing letters of recommendation is a time-consuming task, and it is important to show your appreciation. Also, once you have heard back from the school or employer, let your recommender know the outcome.

Who can I talk to about letters of recommendation?

There are several ways to get more information about how to get letters of recommendation. Within the department, feel free to talk with your advisor or a professor with whom you have had class. Also, visit [*Career Services in Schofield 230*](#). They have a variety of resources to help you with letters of recommendation, as well as with all other aspects of applying to graduate school or for jobs.

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